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Opinion: In 2022, the fog and gloom began to lift

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Body

The turn of the year offers grounds for both optimism and pessimism: The days are lengthening but the temperature is still falling. End-of-year feelings are often a mix, too. We asked people involved in the observance of things present what has them hopeful - and not - this holiday season. Today we hear from Steve Ambler, professor of economics at l'Université du Québec à Montréal:

While 2020 and 2021 can be characterized as pandemic years, 2022 was the year of the pandemic aftermath, which has involved revelations (which are a good thing) about pandemic suppressions (which were not).

We learned more and more, mostly in books by various front-line fighters in the war on the pandemic, of the degree to which genuine scientific debate was suppressed by public health authorities and the media, often in cooperation with each other. This has come out most clearly with the recent publication of the Twitter (<https://financialpost.com/tag/twitter-inc/>) files. Twitter censored some people for overtly political reasons, but it also suppressed tweets on public health policy and climate change (<https://financialpost.com/tag/climate-change/>).

Discussion of such things as: possible collateral damage from lockdowns due to job loss, depression and suicides; the harm from foregone cancer screenings and operations; promising outpatient treatment protocols; the benefits of natural versus vaccine immunity; and so on were all summarily dismissed and suppressed.

In a recent interview, Jay Bhattacharya of Stanford University, one of the co-authors of the Great Barrington Declaration, noted, "They wanted to create this idea that no one reasonable opposed them, no one with scientific credentials opposed them, and that was just a lie."

Jack Dorsey, former CEO of Twitter, had denied when testifying before Congress that Twitter engaged in "shadow banning." We have now learned that it used "trend blacklists" instead. The distinction is just Orwellian Newspeak at its worst.

Suppression of non-mainstream ideas is definitely not "the science" that we were told was informing the policy we weren't allowed to challenge. Science advances by open and frank discussion of the theory and the data, not by silencing dissent. As Einstein said in response to the book One Hundred Scientists against Einstein, "Why 100? If I were wrong, one would have been enough."

This censorship was very discouraging, but I am hopeful that as its extent comes to light, resistance against it will grow.

We have also had important and credible studies by economists on the collateral effects of lockdowns. Already in 2021, Simon Fraser economist Douglas Allen measured the costs of the collateral damage caused by lockdowns

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and weighed them against the limited reduction in hospitalizations and deaths. He concluded that "the reasonable estimate for Canada is a cost/benefit ratio of 141. It is possible that lockdown will go down as one of the greatest peacetime policy failures in modern history." Allen's estimate of 141 will strike most people as shockingly high. But the point is to debate it. How did he get to 141? What assumptions did he make? That's how in science we learn what's true.

William Watson: Poilievre and Anglo-Saxon words(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/pierre-poilievre-anglo-saxon-words>)

Christopher Ragan: It's strange, we have long-term focus in some policy areas but not others(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/long-term-focus-some-policy-areas-not-others>)

FP Comment's 2022 scrapbook: May and June(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/fp-comments-2022-scrapbook-may-and-june>)

This year, Jonas Herby (Copenhagen Center for Political Studies), Lars Jonung (Lund University) and Steve Hanke (Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics) reached similar conclusions on the basis of a meta-analysis of the literature. "Our study finds that lockdowns had little to no effect in reducing COVID-19(<https://financialpost.com/tag/covid-19/>) mortality ... Such a standard benefit-cost calculation leads to a strong conclusion: until future research based on credible empirical evidence can prove that lockdowns have large and significant reductions in mortality, lockdowns should be rejected out of hand as a pandemic policy instrument."

I continue to worry about the predictions of **doom** to which we are constantly subjected, and the effect it may be having on children, including my own adult children. Montreal has just hosted the COP15 biodiversity summit. Delegates were told that a million species or more could become extinct within the next few decades due to **climate** change and loss of habitat. Gregory Wrightstone, using data from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, has shown that species extinctions per decade have fallen from just over 50 in the 1870s to fewer than five in the 2000s. How do we get from fewer than five to more than a million? By using projection models that are not checked against the data.

Since reading the Club of Rome's Limits to Growth and Paul Ehrlich's The Population Bomb in high school in the early 1970s, I have had the time to become inured to predictions of **doom** and gloom that invariably turn out to be false. It's mildly encouraging that even Greta Thunberg qualified the recent COP27 summit in Egypt as a "forum for greenwashing."

To ward off pessimism, I put copies of the book Superabundance by Marian Tupy and Gale Pooley under the Christmas tree for my close family members. They show that when our measure is the time we need to work to acquire things most resources are becoming more abundant, not less. They do acknowledge that's not inevitable but the recent trend is undeniable.

I hope the pandemic will have allowed us to learn from our public policy mistakes so we can avoid repeating them in the future.

- Steve Ambler, professor of economics at l'Université du Québec à Montréal. !@COPYRIGHT=© 2022 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

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